



Flowers in the Garbage: Transformations of Prostitution in Iran in the late Nineteenth-Twenty-First Centuries in Iran

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Abstract

The archaeology of garbage project was conducted in 2017–18 to investigate the daily garbage of inhabitants of two districts of Tehran. Among the discarded materials, we recognized scattered evidence of prostitutes' daily life. Finding such evidence gave us an alibi to work on the historical documents in order to trace the patterns of prostitution in nineteenth-century Tehran. In this article, we configure “the geography of prostitution” and the politics of marginalization in the largest city of Iran through investigating the material culture found in garbage fills, surveying the city plan, photos, written documents, and archival data.

Key words Garbology · Prostitution · Iran · Modernization · Women · Recent/Contemporary past · Red district

Introduction

This paper is a narrative of prostitution and its transformations with the advent of modernism. It does not render a meta-narrative or a general history of prostitution in the recent history of Iran. The authors try to present a detailed narrative, as far as the sources allow, of everyday life of prostitutes in Tehran, Iran. We also endeavour to develop a chronological framework. Archaeologically speaking, the evidence presented two forms of narratives: an official history including states' policies of prostitution, and

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an unofficial, intimate history that can be traced in memoirs, autobiographies, personal notes, photos, and garbage. Significantly, we also access a documentary film about Tehran's red light district which reflects engagement and a critical reading of urban policies. This film documents the district, its public and internal parts. According to the nature of data, we can recognize public and private aspects of prostitution. Fortunately, some historical texts yielded considerable information about the everyday life of prostitutes during the mid- and late-Qajar era (the second half of the nineteenth century).

The most important data about prostitution in the Pahlavi era were the documents of the red district, Shahr-e Now (new city), also known as Qaleh and Qalamestan, which was completely destroyed by fundamentalists in 1979 or 1980 (e.g., Jamaran 2019). Shahr-e Now should be considered as the largest red light district of Tehran which has been expanded since late Qajar period (1796–1925). It was also the only legal place to prostitute. Presumably, the second one must be the red light district in Abadan, southern Iran which has not been studied. In contemporary Iran, the most revealing archaeological data on prostitution is literally garbage. Garbage is the raw material and a theme of study for the archaeologists of the recent past (González-Ruibal 2014: 1690). Waste and discarded materials not only show consumption and its related patterns but also reveal hidden layers of people's lives. In comparison to official reports and archaeological evidence from palaces or administrative centers, an archaeology of garbage provides researchers with significant information about daily life of ordinary people because there is less censorship or secrecy involved (e.g., Rathje and Murphy 2001). Discarded objects can tell a story wildly different from the one reported by consumers (González-Ruibal 2014: 1691).

Garbage-based archaeological data allow researchers to construct microhistories and narratives of prostitution in post-revolutionary Iran, where conducting research on prostitution is difficult because of restrictions and a ban on prostitution. Sociopolitical context over the two last centuries in Iran, with its cultural characteristics and traditions, experienced a transitional phase known as “modernization,” a term that reveals the top-down, authoritative, and short-term nature of the process. Generally, governmental modernization efforts were concentrated on urban development, construction projects, and modern architecture; its implicit appetite for urban life as modern and ideal resulted in strategies such as the compulsory sedentism of nomadic communities. Modernization reform also transformed the subsistence economy, quotidian life and cultural traditions in Iran. The establishment of a modern sexual regime, which was highly advocated by intellectuals and later the Pahlavi government (1925–79), dismantled multiple and fluid sexual traditions within a rather short time (e.g., Afary 2009; Najmabadi 2008). Heterosexualization, pursued by the Pahlavi dynasty and continued under the Islamic regime, not only destroyed different forms of same-sex practices but also left a devastating effect on the lives of prostitutes and even commoners and (non-sex worker) citizens. The destruction of traditional mechanisms that economically empowered women (and families) resulted in waves of immigration to the metropolises since the 1960s, intensified poverty among families, in particular between low-income urban classes and peasants, and, consequently, the growing rate of prostitution (e.g., Papoli-Yazdi et al. 2018). The discursive production of the two concepts of lust and pietism based on Islamic *fiqh* and its exertion on daily life destroyed the civil rights of prostitutes as citizens and marginalized them as deviants after the 1979 revolution.

Chronological Framework of Prostitution in the Early Modern Era

Many women's studies and feminist researchers focus their work on marginalized groups such as women of color, Muslim women, Indigenous communities, lesbians, and sex workers in an attempt to make the invisible visible (e.g., Minault 1986). The set of questions that are implicitly addressed in this research are : have prostitutes in historical epochs suffered a marginalized miserable life? Has their access to social rights been always denied? Here we would like to undermine that marginalization and being subaltern is not natural. It is of vital importance to consider its historicity. Regarding Iran, reliant textual evidence suggests different reflections on prostitution and sex work. In Safavid Iran(1501-1736) prostitution was legal. Prostitutes could enjoy proper life conditions and some were famous as wealthy people (Madani Qahfarrokhi 2015: 60). In the nineteenth century, prostitutes and concubines could entertain their clients with playing music, singing, and dancing. Being expensive, they could afford a good life (e.g., Gorji n.d.; Etemad al-Saltaneh 2000).

To consider the questions in detail and contextualize them, this paper adopts the following chronological framework. It is rational to avoid the homogenous and conventional political chronology and first take into account social changes and prostitution temporality. Accordingly, we divide the period of the nineteenth century to twenty-first century to subperiods to study each in detail.

Phase One: 1848 to 1925. It includes three sub-phases:

1. Early Naseri era (1848-78) the period before the establishment of the police institution; The term Naseri refers to the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, the Qajar king (r. 1848-96).
2. Late Naseri era (1878-96), coincided with the establishment of the modern police.
3. Constitutional and post-constitutional era (1896-1925), the period when the red light district was established.

Phase Two: 1925 to 1979 (First and Second Pahlavi eras), the red-light district was developed during these years.

Phase Three: post 1979 revolution

Obviously, prostitution can take many forms, from streetwalkers to brothels. Given the existence of only certain (and really limited) types of data on prostitution in the (second) Pahlavi era (1941-79), the present paper only investigates officially and legally recognized forms of prostitution in Shahr-e Now. Some uncertified reports and newspapers such as *Etela'at* which was released on January 29, 1979 indicate the outburst of a big fire in the district during the last and tense days of revolution, when 400 brothels in the district were destroyed (Madani Qahfarrokhi 2015: 67). Later, Shahr-e Now was completely destroyed after the revolution and its dwellers were either executed, injured, or exiled. Hence, studying this subject, even though through scattered, inadequate evidence, is of vital importance. Prostitution after the revolution will be chiefly discussed according to the results of the contemporary garbage archaeology project.

Phase One: Before the Establishment of Shahr-e Now

Tehran in the early Naseri Era

The investigation of a wide range of material culture (especially visual evidence), literature, official reports, memoirs, and travelogues show that heterosexuality was not the dominant norm before modernization. Sexual life in pre-modern Qajar Iran (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) can be considered multiple and changing. Different and changing sexual relations were practiced in Qajar society. The absence of a homogenizing sexual regime allowed women and men and other genders to engage in different sexual practices including same-sex practices while sexual intercourse could theoretically happen in houses, gardens, and other places. Sexual practice was sometimes accompanied by transvestism and even performances (see Najmabadi 2008). Najmabadi (2005: 3) confronts the assumed normalcy of the man/woman binary by mapping modes of maleness in nineteenth-century Iran that were distinct from manhood. Eunuchs, *amrads*, and *mukhanaths/ma'bun* (an adult man interested in being the partner of adult men) were born biologically male but their identity was recognized from adult men. *Amrads*, *mukhannaths*, and even eunuchs got involved in romantic relationships, courtships, and sexual intercourse. In his diaries, Etemad al-Saltaneh (2000) narrates the amour and sexual relationship between Atabak, the chancellor, and Ali Khan-e Khajeh, one of the royal court eunuchs. Epistle of Fojuriya, a manuscript on sexual enjoyment, demonstrates the fluidity of sexual desire. The book narrates the sexual adventure of Vali Khan, one of Naser al-Din Shah's courtiers, who dedicated the book to the king for his joy. The writer describes a range of sexual practices with married ladies, virgins, *amrads*, and a youngster or young beardless man involved in "a relationship in which the younger one, *amrad*, would be the desired and beloved object for an adult man" (Najmabadi 2005: 59), *qolam* (bondman), and *kaniz* (bondwoman). *Qolams* and *kanizes* were bought and kept by the royal court, aristocrats, and urban upper classes, though sex was not always the main purpose of keeping them. It is almost impossible to assign a special sexual identity to him. Interestingly, the visual evidence including paintings, wall paintings, and lacquer paintings on small items of everyday life, such as jewelry boxes, mirrors, and pen boxes, describing same-sex, anal sex, vaginal sex, etc. in one frame. Literary, there are no words for gender and sexuality either in modern Persian or classic literature indicating that sexual life had an indeterminate nature without any clear borders and categories. Investigating Iranian classic literature, Shamisa (2003: 256) concludes that the "beloved" in pre-modern Persian literature is usually male. This flexible sexual life dramatically changed in a gradual process from the constitutional era to early twentieth century. The existence of brothels in different post-Islamic eras has been historically reported. Many historians and European travellers confirmed the establishment of female brothels (e.g., Madani Qahfarrokhi 2015: 60–61) and *amrad khanes* (male brothels) in Safavid Iran (e.g., Afary 2009). Floor (2008) states that Karim Khan-e Zand (r. 1750–79) established a brothel for his soldiers near their garrison. Polak, the Naseri royal court physician, states that there was a red light district in Tehran in the Fathali Shah (r. 1798–1834) era and a district in Shiraz, that had been established under Karim Khan-e Zand (Floor 2008: 212) but Mohammad Shah (r. 1834–48) ordered the closure of the brothels. Under his son, Naser al-Din Shah, prostitution was recognized as illegal, but prostitutes were still active in the country (Polak 1989: 330).

Apparently, the number of brothels, due to the above mentioned circumstances, especially royal decrees, decreased in the middle Qajar era. It seems that in the relative absence of a red-light district, three forms of sexual services were available: *amrads* and presumably prostitutes were available in coffee houses as well as in private places. Evidence, in particular Tehran police reports from the late Naseri era, indicate that many prostitutes personally went to these places - usually houses of their customers. Also in one interesting case, the police had discovered a small brothel with four prostitutes that illegally offered sexual services (Shaykh Rezaie and Azari 1999: 371). Some worked with male pimps and some with female pimps:

“A woman called Sakineh takes prostitutes around the city causing trouble and disorder has been arrested by police officers. It has been ordered to banish her from the city” (Shaykh Rezaie and Azari 1999: 664).

According to several reports, female and male prostitutes lived in the capital on their own in their private houses:

“A prostitute whose name is Galin has recently moved to Ghariban alley. She has quarrelled with some seyeds (descendants of the Prophet Mohammad), who live in the neighbourhood. The police officers have arrested her to investigate the case and punish her accordingly” (Shaykh Rezaie and Azari 1999: 709).

Prostitutes not only offered their services to ordinary people but also to the elite, courtiers, and upper classes. Etemad al-Saltaneh (2000) in his memoirs and Vali Khan-e Gorji (n.d.) in his book *Epistle of Fojuriya* (sexual enjoyment) demonstrates the presence of prostitutes in the houses of elite men. Royal court staff, passengers, and even people who made a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mashhad enjoyed the sexual services of prostitutes (Etemad al-Saltaneh 2000; Floor 2008: 216). British official George Curzon, who visited Mashhad in the late nineteenth century, was stunned by the practice of temporary marriage, which he called “the most extraordinary feature of Mashhad life.” (Afary 2009: 65). In a nut shell, having sex with prostitutes did not attach stigma to people. Narrating the king’s trip to Qazvin, Etemad al-Saltaneh writes about easy access to prostitutes:

“By the way, Mirza Mohammad Ali the alderman, the relative of decedent Sepahsalar, who knows me, paid me a visit stating that a young man from Qazvin had come to his home and claimed that he knew a beautiful woman. If you are interested, he can arrange a date. I simply said that I was not interested” (Etemad al-Saltaneh 2000: 482).

It is worthy of note that sexual relationships outside marriage, in particular prostitution, was (and is still) religiously considered Haram (illegitimate), but remarkably, we do not have any evidence in favor of pressure imposed by clerics on prostitutes. Apart from prostitution, are other forms of sexual services. *Kanizes* and concubines were also kept in the royal harem and by noble classes. Therefore, temporary marriage, known in Shia Islam as *siqeh*, with concubines was a popular way to receive sexual services. Bibi Khanom-e Astarabadi (1992) in her book, *Ma ayebe al-Rejal* (Vices of Men), explains

how aristocrat families appreciated concubinage for their young, still-unmarried men and also married men. Temporary wives of elite men often lived comfortably even when the marriage contract was valid only for a short period. *Kanizes* who were usually young Circassian girls, from a region in Caucasus, were usually bought for the royal harem and for aristocrats. By that time, there was a big demand and Mecca acted as the most important center for this trade (e.g., Afary 2009). But these later forms were not usually appreciated by commoners. It is worthy of note that concubinage was legal; however, its main purpose was to enjoy sexual relationships. Hence, concubines were recognized from prostitutes as a form of employment, though they also provided sexual services in exchange for compensation.

The Establishment of Modern Police and the Official History of Violence Against Prostitutes

The first encounters of the government with prostitutes have been reported by the Tehran police. On November 11, 1878, the great police and municipality administration of the capital city in Almasiyeh Street was officially established. Count de Monte Forte was appointed by Naser al-Din Shah as the first chief of the Tehran police. A year later, in October 1879, the chief of police introduced the police manual including 57 articles approved by the king (Motamedi 2002: 576). According to Etemad al-Saltaneh (1995), the king decided to establish the police force after his second trip to Europe. Actually, the annual reports of the Tehran Police from 1886 to 1888 are the most significant and detailed primary source on prostitution and its transformation due to government intervention. The police manual presents a list of crimes: Prostitution, guilt, *lèse-majesté*, violation of religious rules, robbery, and insulting police officers had been declared as major crimes (Shaykh Rezaie and Azari 1999: 12). Iranian governments issued prostitution bans due to moral and religious concerns from time to time, but it was actually the first time that prostitution was announced as a crime. Police reports of this period have registered several cases of prostitutes arrest:

“Mohammad Ebrahim has taken a prostitute to his home causing trouble and disorder. Both of them have been captured. The prostitute must be banished from the city and he will be tried at the court house” (Shaykh Rezaie and Azari 1999: 430).

For the first time the government issued a rule which recognized both prostitution and sex with prostitutes as crimes. The punishment for prostitutes was banishment from the city and for male offenders a three-day detention or minor physical punishments. But according to Etemad al-Saltaneh (2000), these actions had a temporary nature. Prostitutes paid tax and it was a source of income for the government. Moreover, the Count received bribes and banishment was not enforced in practice:

“Today it was ordered to banish hookers. The king issues such decrees every year but they are put in action only a few days. Count de Monte Forte and Nayebe al-Saltaneh put women under pressure and took huge amounts of money from them” (Etemad al-Saltaneh 2000: 212).

The police manual also restricted the activities of coffee houses, where people could presumably take drugs, have sex with prostitutes or *amrads*, and drink alcoholic drinks. Dehkhoda narrates the life of a man, Azad Khan, who falls in love with a young waiter in a coffee house but cannot court him because this “requires money,” and he is destitute (Sur-e Israfil June 5, 27, 1907–08, cited in Afary 2009: 140). According to the police manual, “the coffee houses destroy financial resources and public health” (Hassanbeigi 2003: 305).

Generally speaking, documents scarcely report the exertion of violence, especially physical violence, against prostitutes. Citizens tolerate prostitutes according to *orf*, customs, and religion, *sharia*:

“Last night a prostitute bought some meat and was on her way without wearing proper hijab. The cops followed her in order to arrest her. But she threw herself inside the house of Seyed Abutaleb Sadr al-Zakerin. His son closed the door and helped her escape from the back door” (Shaykh Rezaie and Azari 1999: 620).

Prostitution, and more generally “sexual services for money,” was simply one aspect of urban life in Iran, though practiced in different ways by different classes. Definitely, the establishment of the police force can be recognized as part of early modernization. The banishment of prostitutes and the arrest of drunk people in public introduced the formation of the public sphere (in contrast to the private sphere) in its modern sense. Apparently, using certain phrases about prostitutes, such as “causing trouble and disorder,” that were not used about the drunks, refers to prostitution as violating the public sphere.

The Constitutional and Post-Constitutional Era: The Gradual Establishment of the New Sexual Regime and the Early Stage of Red Light District

After the Iran-Russia wars in the early nineteenth century, during Fath-ali Shah’s reign (1797–1834), and the heavy defeats of Iranians which introduced miserable results to the country, some Iranian elites and intellectuals called for reforms. The demands for social and political change increased in the middle Qajar era; though, some political actions, such as the establishment of a royal council and urban development and Western-inspired construction projects, were already initiated by Naser al-Din Shah. But the government did not take proper action until the end of the Naseri era. This caused the assassination of the king during the celebration of his fiftieth anniversary in 1896. The establishment of a constitutional kingship and the opening of a national parliament in 1906 intensified the process. The intellectuals who advocated political reforms also called for social reforms. They regarded prostitution and same-sex practices as social maladies. It was the first time that sexual life in society was highly criticized. “Calls for changes in sexual relations were at the root of the reform movement in Iran and emerged alongside other social, political, and economic demands at the turn of the twentieth century” (Afary 2009: 118). Taj al-Saltaneh, daughter of Naser al-Din Shah, and one of the strong advocates of the constitutional movement, in describing her trip to Tabriz and observing women in rural areas in her memoirs concludes that:

“The most significant factor contributing to the destruction of the country, immorality, and backwardness is hijab. No one engages in prostitution in rural areas, because men and women get married only when they have the same financial condition. They freely choose their marital partner on their own, as nobody uses face cover and they can see each other and then decide” (Taj al-Saltaneh 1982: 101).

Apparently, Taj tries to link prostitution to the hijab and considers it as an urban phenomenon; this point of view leads her to criticize gender norms and women’s veiling. Also, freethinkers, intellectuals, and revolutionists such as Mirza Agha Khan-e Kermani and Mirza Fathali Akhondzadeh, and even Iraj Mirza, the poet famous for his homoerotic poems, criticized veiling and advocated a modern gender regime. They disparaged traditions such as concubinage and the keeping of bondmen and women by the upper classes.

By this time, the first years after the Constitution, prostitutes still lived in cities and offered their services, as there were no strict rules against prostitution. Since Mozaffar al-Din Shah’s reign, the government did not prevent the establishment of brothels in the capital city (Floor 2008: 222). Moreover, some scholars have discussed the rise of the erotica industry by this time. Toward the end of the nineteenth century there was the semblance of an erotic photography industry instrumental in producing, selling, and collecting photographs of famous women, particularly prostitutes and *motrebs* (musicians) (Scheiwiller 2017:115) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Prostitute and *motreb* (musician) (Scheiwiller 2017:106)

In the post-constitutional era, the early twentieth century, two main factors derived from modernization transformed prostitution: heterosexualization and the establishment of red light districts. Article 207 of Iran's Criminal Code, approved in 1926, defined male-male sexual intercourse as sodomy and included sodomy in the category of rape. According to the sodomy law, the punishment for sodomy was three to 10 years in prison, the same prison sentence for those convicted of raping the opposite sex (Floor 2008). After the 1921 coup and the rise to power of Seyed Zia al-Din as prime minister and Reza Khan as minister of war to power, the patterns of prostitution slightly changed. Shahri's report is noteworthy:

An outskirt district, located southwest of Tehran, with an area of about one square kilometre known as the Customs Office, was one of the peripheral towns outside Tehran [...] with beautiful landscapes and vast gardens:

“Under prime minister Seyed Zia al-Din Tabatabai, this place turned into the residence of prostitutes. He ordered to gather all of them from within the city, from Qajar's neighbourhood, Chale Seylabi and Sar-e Qabr-e Agha, from crypts and ditches and settled them in that neighbourhood. In order to prevent their presence in the city and their communication with ordinary people, the government imposed banning laws with heavy penalties and nominated a special police to keep the district under control. In order to keep customers satisfied, he ordered residents to keep the city, houses and shops clean. In addition, he set a fixed rate for women and built a hospital for patients, with weekly examination of prostitutes, and issued health check cards for them. He separated all the district's needs from Tehran and its citizens. Also, he set fixed hours (usually around sunset) for customers (Shahri 1993: 394–5).”

According to late-Qajar statistics, the number of Tehran residences was 147,256 in 1867 and 250,000 in 1930; of this number 2% of residences were located in District 9 (Shahr-e Now) (Takmil Homayoun 2000: 31). According to historical documents, such as letters of complaint registered by the local court, the district was still a residential area in the late 1910s. In an interesting case Seyed Mohammad, a carpet merchant, brought charges against Shekh Reza, the bookseller who lived in Qavam Daftar Street, later one of the main streets of the red light district. Seyed Mohammad filed a complaint against him because he refused to give the money back.

With the arrival and settlement of prostitutes, gradually this district became a complete town (Shahri 1993: 397). Based on the 1922 census, 1.5% of women, 1% of girls, 2% of women known as “single fliers” (*tak parans*), 1.5% of boys, 1% of anonymous individuals, and in total nearly 5% of Tehran's population of 240,000 earned a living through prostitution (Floor 2008: 24).

Phase two: Shahr-e Now

The decline of the Qajar dynasty resulted in the growing number of prostitutes. When Reza Shah officially declared the overthrow of the dynasty, he evicted royal harem women (Fig. 2) (Bahar 1978).

Presumably, some harem women became poor and displaced, as Reza Khan cut their pension completely. Issuing a decree, the police deported the prostitutes and sent them



Fig. 2 Naser al-Din Shah's royal harem women (Golestan Palace collection)

to Qazvin Gate in a neighborhood called “Qajar quarter.” Reza Shah reconstructed part of the neighborhood and gathered prostitutes and sent them to Shahr-e Now; all these quarters can be considered as one neighborhood. The government claimed that this strategy would control prostitution. Zand-e Moqadam (1957: 5-6) describes Shahr-e Now in his monograph as follows:

“There is an iron gate permanently guarded by soldiers. The cold weapons which have been discovered by frisking have been gathered in a metal box. By the sunset, there is always a line of customers waiting to enter. The guards search the customers and scan them with their eyes. Eventually, around midnight customers are allowed to enter. The gate opens to a street without proper paving and full of dust. There are two narrow gutters on both sides of the street covered with thick and dark layers of mud. The pavement is also covered with mud and on its sides there are houses, usually one floor, two stories and sometimes three-story houses. As soon as you go through the gate, the nasty smell of urine, garbage, unhealthy dirty bodies, infectious wounds, and remains of puke annoy you. And all of a sudden you come across an old miserable woman, stuck to the pavement like a trampled beetle. Qaleh has two main streets, Haj Abol Mahmoud and Qavam Daftar; both of them have been designed parallel to each other, dead end and without proper paving. Some secondary streets connect to them. The shops include grocery, bakery, butchery, beauty salon and dressmaking (Floor 2008: 232) (Fig. 3).”

Since the 1940s there have been different censuses about prostitution. In 1949, it was estimated that 4,000 prostitutes (Fig. 4) worked in Shahr-e Now, though the number of street prostitutes in Tehran was unknown (Floor 2008: 230). The physician



Fig. 3 A general view of shops and street in Qaleh (Kaveh Golestan)

of Shahr-e Now, Zand-e Moqadam, filed a report stating that 6,000 health check cards had been issued in the 1940s (Fig. 5); of this number 4,500 cards had been invalidated due to the death or escape of the card holders (Zand-e Moqadam 1957: 57). It is noteworthy that the population of Tehran in the last years of Reza Shah's reign, in the late 1930s, was estimated about 700,000 (Takmil Homayoun 2000: 162). It is plausible that the rate of prostitution in 1940s was probably high.

Government attempts to establish heterosexuality as the dominant sexual regime affected the situation of prostitutes of both sexes. According to Shahri (1990, VI: 339), the state encouraged the *zan-baz* (men who were inclined to heterosexuality and extra-marital affairs), but chastised, arrested, and punished the opposite faction (men who were inclined to homosexuality). Thus the visibility of this second group gradually diminished, while those of the *zan-baz* and female prostitutes increased (Afary 2009: 160).

Taking different actions and initiatives in 1973, the government claimed that the rate of prostitution had decreased, pimps had been arrested, and all prostitutes had been moved to Shahr-e Now. Now, police and public health officials were able to control the situation. The prostitutes enjoyed literacy and education, attended training courses and



Fig. 4 Prostitutes in Qaleh (Kaveh Golestan)



Fig. 5 Health check card of a prostitute (Ilina.ir)

consequently, had the opportunity to marry and have families (Floor 2008: 237). But the studies reveal the miserable living conditions beyond the walls of Shahr-e Now.

According to Zand-e Moqadam (1957), Shahr-e Now consisted of the homes, stores, a police station, a clinic, and a movie theater. The plan shows that the details, elements, and precision of traditional architecture have not been considered in Shahr-e Now. The same place was used for work and personal life. In contrast, in traditional architecture, space was articulated into a range of public, semi-private (archways, alleys, dead ends, and platforms in front of the houses), and private areas producing a sense of safety and intimacy. There were no exclusive rooms for women, men, and children working in Shahr-e Now. Women had to work and live in small rooms, sometimes as small as a single bed (Fig. 6).

A circular for urgent action issued by the National Police, governed by the ministry of interior on November 10, 1958 strongly ordered to move prostitutes who lived in Sarab and Jamshidi streets (District 20) to Qaleh [Shahr-e Now]. The letter had been signed by lieutenant general Batmanqelij (Fig. 7) (SAKMA (national center for documents, Tehran) document number 290/1072: 3). Beyond the walls of Shahr-e Now, violence was perpetrated against inferior classes. The workers and customers of Shahr-e Now were from lower socioeconomic classes; workers (usually as customers), addicts, doorkeepers, and pimps, old, ill, and disabled women, homeless and jobless people, deserted children, and the children of prostitutes. As a matter of fact, Shahr-e Now became a place for homeless people and especially deserted women. Investigating the background of women, Zand-e Moqadam (1957) concludes that many of them had come to Shahr-e Now due to poverty and homelessness on their own or by pimps and



Fig. 6 A room in Qaleh (Kaveh Golestan)

even drivers (Shahri 1993: 282; La'l-e Shateri and Vakili 2016: 65). The increase in trafficking women and girls usually resulted in forced prostitution.



Fig. 7 A letter signed by lieutenant general Batmanqelji (SAKMA, 290/ 1072: 3)

Phase three: Prostitution in Contemporary Iran: Garbage as Archaeological Material

The archaeology of garbage, later known as garbology, is a method developed by William Rathje during 1970s (Rathje 2001; Rathje and Murphy 2001). His garbage project was conducted in Tucson, Arizona, and the first aim was to understand consumption according to social status (e.g., Reckner and Brighton 1999). His fabulous work over decades showed how consumption (Majewski and Schiffer 2015) has shaped the social body of norms of modern Americans.

We adopted this method in Iran. Supported by Tehran Municipality, our aim was to document the patterns of consumption and recycling (at home). But as soon as we started, we came across the increasing rate of poverty through material culture. Since 2017, due to dramatic currency devaluation, growing poverty has severely affected Iranians' lifestyle. To document this change, we decided to conduct the project in three districts in the first phase; a district where low income communities live, a district populated by middle class citizens, and the third one where the wealthier citizens live. After working in the two first districts, the mayor of Tehran was changed and we were unable to continue the project for unknown reasons.

The garbage project was conducted in two field phases, first in winter 2017 and then continued in spring and summer 2018 (Fig. 8). During the project, two districts of Tehran's 22 districts were surveyed. At the very beginning in winter 2017, District 17, located in southwestern Tehran, was investigated. Later in March, the field work was conducted in District 7 and continued in April 2018. It should be noted that each district includes several neighborhoods and quarters, usually in the same socioeconomic level but sometimes exceptional quarters exist.

Statistically speaking, District 17 is known as a district where people of lower status, including lower economic classes, live. Covered by scattered gardens, the district was rarely occupied before the 1960s. It was occupied by immigrants from the western provinces (Azerbaijan, Ardebil, and later Qazvin) in the 1960s. A decade later, people from rural areas who had lost their incomes, as a direct consequence of land reforms conducted by Shah in the 1960s, formed the second wave of immigration to the district.



Fig. 8 An alley in District 17 (photo by team of Garbology)

According to 63 interviews, these were mostly farmers who had sold their small plots in their hometowns to buy property in Tehran (e.g., Bayat 1997) .

The third wave was comprised of people from the northern provinces who were the victims of the 1979 revolution, lost their farms and had to immigrate to Tehran. Eventually, the fourth wave includes the people who experienced a sharp change in their lifestyles over the last two decades (2000–18) due to gradual currency devaluation under President Ahmadinejad, and in particular his anti-middle class policies, which have continued under President Rouhani. These people are the most educated residents of the district, mostly from middle class backgrounds who found no way to continue living in Tehran but found places in the southern districts.

The second surveyed district is District 7 located in northeastern Tehran where middle-class families with well-off backgrounds live. The exception in this district is the Nezam Abad neighborhood, which can be described as an isolated island. The people living in this neighborhood are addicts, prostitutes, criminals, and some mafia-related families who immigrated to the district from the mid-1970s. Nezam Abad actually plays the role of a red light district in the heart of the city, which fits the description of a more modern substitute for Shahr-e Now, though illegal.

Beyond Neazam Abad to the north, the face of the district changes and new buildings, highways, and many governmental buildings appear. Sohrevardi and Majidiyeh used to be traditionally expensive neighborhoods where well-off families and Armenians lived. Several cafes, galleries, and restaurants are located in these neighborhoods.

In general, during the first season of the project, the team gathered information about waste from 1,004 samples. The garbage bags were collected from the large waste containers which are placed in every avenue of Tehran to collect the daily domestic garbage. It is noteworthy that the garbage is not usually recycled by families and one may find the whole remains in the garbage bags. Our methodology was a mixture of observation, interview, and classification of garbage. The interview team attempted to find families who have wasted their daily garbage to fill in the questionnaires while the archaeological team searched the waste containers to find garbage bags in order to classify and document them. Considering garbage as modern archaeological material, the team decided to study it in its context. The bags were weighed and their contents were sorted. Each item was carefully registered in tables which helped with post-survey analysis. Among the samples were bags which did not reflect family life patterns and seemed a little mysterious. What was the story behind them? They seemed to be simply filled during half of the day with fast food, chocolate, and cigarettes. Were they significant objects representing a hidden life style? For four days we attempted to find the answer.

District 17

Our very first encounter with prostitution occurred in March 2017. One day when we were picking up some garbage bags from a waste container, we found an open bag in which were new packages of underwear, pizza boxes and cigarette trash. We were working in a neighborhood where most of the residents did not have enough money to buy meat or fruits, and more than 60% of the families ate only pasta (without meat),

bread, cheap vegetables, and occasionally (once or at most twice a week) chicken and eggs (the statistics have been derived from the garbage project). For us, it was strange to find the package of new sexy lingerie of a famous Iranian brand. Another strange thing was the cigarette butts with traces of lipstick on them (Fig.9). Contextually, such material culture never appeared in other bags. When we were speaking together, a young woman came out of a barbershop and gazed at us. She was around 20 years old and had on new, fashionable clothes. Looking at us, she immediately returned to the shop and came out with three other women, all young. It was obvious that they were speaking about us, from their faces one could see that they were anxious. We wondered if they had thought that we were spying on them. They did not like to communicate with us and their different appearance in the district which is famous as a center of advocates for the Islamic regime seemed strange. That evening, we went to a café where a friend of ours, a sociologist, who works due to the economic crisis. We knew she had been working on women's rights for years, so we wondered if she could analyze the phenomenon we had observed. She was the first person who opened our eyes to the possibility of prostitution. She kindly introduced me to Setareh La'l who also studies prostitution and has conducted several interviews with prostitutes. She confirmed that evidence of prostitution has been reported from the district. She also showed me on the map the areas where we were likely to encounter the phenomenon again.

We warned the team members to report any suspicious stuff they might find during the sorting. After three days, we found a waste container into which several pairs of women's shoes had been dumped. This container provided us with three other garbage bags. Two of them were filled with fast food remains and cigarette butts - again with traces of lipstick. We were working on the material when a white Renault parked just in front of us. A young woman came out and rudely insulted us. "Why are you beggar bitches working here?" We preferred to remain silent. The woman, in her thirties, had put on full makeup and was wearing short, tight jeans and a vest. She entered a small old house which was covered by dark pieces of Styrofoam. We heard her speaking loudly with someone, insulting and screaming. Fifteen minutes later, an old couple riding a motorcycle arrived at the house. The woman got off and knocked at the door.



Fig. 9 Butts with traces of lipstick (photo by team of Garbology)

The young woman asked “who is it?” The old woman fully covered in veil, replied “auntie.” This is a colloquial word used for female pimps. The old woman got inside and told the old man that it was his turn. The old man went into the house while the old woman was looking around, gazing at us for a couple of moments and then she, too, went into the house. Near the house, little boys were playing soccer. We gathered them and told them some fairy tales to. Our hearts were heavy at the time. We felt anxious and sorry for the little children playing around and observing such scenes and We could not do anything.

Twenty minutes later, the young woman came out, insulted us again “Ahhh, you are still picking up garbage!” Then she started her car and went away. A minute later, the old man came out but the old woman remained inside. A young man in a shop on the avenue asked about our project. We talked to him, answered his questions, and gave him and a friend of him some flyers on recycling. He advised us not to come back to that avenue because “there are not so many ‘house wives’ in the neighborhood.” That was one of the key words revealing that we had accidentally discovered an illegal red-light district.

During the next weeks, we came back several times to the avenue and its surrounding area. From the waste containers, we found numerous fast food remains, cigarette butts, drugs (joints, grass and opium remains), and unusual female underwear. Actually, to our extreme surprise, we did not find condoms in the district; but rather anti-contraceptive pills.

Interviews showed that the prostitutes working in the district lived out of the neighborhood and the male clients were not local residents. Only the pimps were from the district. The agents in two real estate agencies declared that the pimps usually rented second-hand houses anonymously. Also, from the interviews we figured out that it was common in low-income districts for clients to provide a meal and cigarettes for prostitutes. In some cases, they eat together and it was the reason why we found garbage bags containing two boxes of fast food.

On another occasion, we accidentally met a teenaged girl waiting on the main street in the neighborhood. Suddenly, a young man (who, judging from his clothes, appeared to be a worker) approached her and spoke with her. We were gathering garbage at the same time and were able to hear that they were negotiating money and food. Later we learned that she had seen that they had bought sandwiches and went to a half-built building where probably the young man was working. The following day, another young woman came to us and aggressively insulted us. That day, I was working with Ma’soumeh who declared that the woman was obviously a drug addict. She was smoking and I could feel the heavy smell of her body. She was around us until someone called her. “Bring me my favorite food and drug...yes! I will stick around...waiting for you. Come back soon” she replied. She was skinny and seemed to be terribly sick. Her fingers and lips were blackened and her face was dirty. She really seemed to have been hungry for days. We saw her joining a tall boy, who was also dirty and had a plastic bag in his hand containing boxes of Kebab (a rather cheap sort of Kebab called Koubideh which is also served as fast food).

Another team working in parallel streets also reported similar experiences. They had met a skinny woman, who seemed to be a drug addict, with a little child waiting for the pimp. One of the team members had felt so sorry for the woman that they offered some money to her to buy some food for the child but she had not accepted the money and

had refused to continue speaking with her. They had witnessed cars coming from the northern highway driven by women who stayed only for 20 or 30 minutes in the covered houses (their windows were fully covered) and then left the neighborhood. From the waste container they investigated, several fast food bags were found that they had named “couple garbage bags.”

District 7

We did not find any evidence of prostitution in the northern half of the district. Actually, many garbage bags' contents represented lifestyles of single people. According to our investigation, many single working women lived in the neighborhood. Toward the south, we found evidence of prostitution in Nezam Abad where, in fact, we expected to encounter such material. Before, in the municipality office, we had been told that the neighborhood was not safe for women and we had been warned that it was better not to investigate it. We recognized structural differences between the neighborhood and District 17. People living in Nezam Abad were not as poor as people in District 17. We found the remains of red meat, bones, and shop receipts which were confirmed in the interviews with butchers. The people living in the district ate fresh vegetables, rice, beans, and dairy products. Also for the first time, we found evidence of consuming alcoholic drinks which were evidently homemade. In Iran, alcoholic drinks are officially banned but it is quite common to make wine, beer, and even a kind of local vodka (*Aragh*) at home. Industrial products are smuggled into the country as well.

The first trace of prostitution was found by Hassan. In the bag he was documenting, he found condoms (Fig. 10), cigarette butts, chocolate, cake wrappers, and teabags. These are not traces of family life usually appearing in garbage bags, such as the remains of healthy home-made foods, diaries, or children-related materials. Surprisingly, the pattern of “couple garbage bags” did not repeat in the new district, and instead of fast food, we found cakes and snacks accompanying condoms.

One Friday, which is a national weekend in Iran, we were working in the district when Ma'soumeh brought some news. On that day, the shops were all closed and their



Fig. 10 Garbage bag containing condoms (photo by team of Garbology)

shutters had been lowered. Accidentally, Ma'soumeh had overheard two individuals speaking behind locked shutters. For us, that was a clue. We discovered that there were people in those shops taking drugs or having sex; we were able to hear them speaking and laughing. That day we found out that some people were eyeing us. Feeling uneasy, we attempted to collect all our stuff to get out of the neighborhood, but we came across a tall young woman who was trembling. She was in blue jeans, wearing a new, well-made purple scarf, but was barefoot. She stood close to us and then went to the public telephone kiosk and called someone and asked for money.

Analysis

Archaeology has the potential to be “democratic,” as it analyzes things everybody produces: “material remains” usually called “garbage” (Rathje and McCarthy 1977). As a consequence, it creates alternative stories, giving voice to invisible, minority, and oppressed groups. In this context, archaeology gives researchers the opportunity to build a “history of the people without history” (Zarankin and Funari 2008: 311–12). While the studies of prostitution in post-revolutionary Iran suffer data and information shortcomings, due to state's policies, the garbage made us go deeper through prostitution and the miserable life conditions of prostitutes and commoners in marginalized neighborhoods. According to the consumption patterns (mostly food consumption), District 17 can be divided into four sub-districts: western (mostly occupied by people from northern provinces), eastern, northern (mostly occupied by Khorassani and Turkish people from Qazvin and Azerbaijan) and southwestern (mostly occupied by Afghan refugees). The evidence of prostitution has been reported only from the eastern zone and mostly from seven alleys. Twelve percent of the garbage bags documented in these alleys contained “couple fast food” remains. All of them also contained cigarette butts, while 3% also contained drug remains (opium, weed, and hash). Not only in this zone but all over District 17, the remains of neuro-drugs - mostly amphetamines - were considerably high. The amount of drugs increased through the southern region, which were evidently occupied by people of lower statuses.

In Nezam Abad, 9% of the garbage bags from central alleys contained indications of prostitution. Unlike District 17, prostitutes in District 7 (mostly from central alleys of the district) did not oblige the client to buy food. Evidence of prostitution increased during weekends and holidays and shows that most of the clients came from the other parts of the city. These bags contained cigarettes, snacks, and condoms, also in rare cases (3) alcohol. Our premise is that sex workers are the inhabitants of the District 7 neighborhood.

The observed evidence in these two districts presents two different patterns of prostitution. In District 17, sex workers mostly do not live in the neighborhood but the pimps seem to live there. The houses which they use as temporary brothels are located close to mosques and militia (*Basij*) centers which may be a pretext or strategy in order to hide and avoid police ambush. According to few sex workers observed in the area, poverty, misery, starvation, and drug abuse forced some female inhabitants of the district to work as prostitutes. To sum up, it is not rare to buy sex workers' services by offering a meal or paying a very small amount of money to the prostitutes so that they can buy drugs.

In contrast, in Nezam Abad, apparently one of the traditional contexts of mafia and crime, involvement in crime is a lifestyle. According to interviews with municipality agents, police, and inhabitants, brothels in the area are controlled by some well-known gangs. It is noteworthy that the primary motivation of the prostitutes living in Nezam Abad should be poverty, which forces women to adopt this lifestyle from very young ages. Finding condoms shows that the prostitutes in this neighborhood might be more professional.

The second pattern is based on the materials discovered in District 7. Not only old houses but closed shops may have been rented to be used as hidden brothels. In contrast with District 17, prostitutes and pimps all live in the same neighborhood, while clients may come from other districts. In District 17, street prostitution was reported; while in District 7, no evidence of street sex workers was observed, which confirms the more professional sex working style.

Conclusion: Modern States, Urban Development, and the Production of Non-Citizens

In the Qajar era, citizens, elites, nobles, and even royal court members enjoyed services offered by sex workers including prostitutes. It would be plausible to consider prostitution before modernization as part of quotidian life, but since the middle-Qajar, late-Naseri era, with the establishment of the modern police force, the prostitutes were driven out of the public sphere and even their private residences. During the last 100 years, since the Black Coup of Seyed Zia, modern governments have systemically deported prostitutes from the cities. After the establishment of legal prostitution, red-light districts were constructed outside the cities. Deportation dismantled civil rights in practice. Discussing space (Lefebvre 1981: 17) states that “segregation and discrimination should not remove people from the urban space.” “There are also crucial issues around the idea of marginalization or regionalization. This was one of Lefebvre’s points in his call for the right to the city [ville]” (Elden 2007: 106).

Urban modernization, expansion of urbanism, and unparalleled development victimized the poor, rural residents, and nomads, while the well-off citizens and some newly emerged classes, such as brokers and in particular stock brokers (e.g., Takmil Homayoun 2000: 81), enjoyed urban progress. As “Lefebvre argued that space is the ultimate locus and medium of struggle, and is, therefore, a crucial political issue” (Elden 2007: 107). The production of non/lesser citizens ended in marginal areas, socially and physically, around urban centers which made the governments take action but usually without any success. Modernization pushed poverty, misery, disability, illness, addiction, illiteracy, and sexual violence out of the new developing urban areas. The marginalized were all inferiors, the ones that the government attempted to eliminate from public space, the ones whose existences destroyed the constitution of the modern face of urban space. According to the evidence, Shahr-e Now resists discussion as a “common red-light district,” a form of employment; instead it should be deemed a slum. Completely different from rural, urban, and nomadic life, Shahr-e Now was actually a new kind of marginalized slum life outside Tehran for inferiors. The ones that “their lives, and their forms of life, mark a devious, dangerous expression of the human, one that matters intensely as a potential disruption of normative orders of the human

through perhaps aberrant, but very human, modes of race, gender, and sexuality” (Walker 2015: 142).

It is noteworthy that after the destruction of Shahr-e Now, the Islamic state has always denied the existence of brothels and has systematically tried to ignore any warning about the increasing number of prostitutes (Moeedfar 2018). Due to a long-term censor, the reliable information on the geography of prostitution in Iran is very limited. In such a condition, archaeology potentially can explore the patterns of prostitution. As for material culture, Elaine McKewon (2003: 309) suggests that there is a consistent relation between the modern city and where the prostitutes work. Indeed, the industry managed to locate near its major client bases in the central city area, zones of transition, and suburban client catchments. Other scholars have followed the aggressive influence of political conflicts on the rate of prostitution (Smith 2010). In Tehran, we observed the connection of both patterns where the increased extension of geography of prostitution ties to the increasing political tensions, social problems, and poverty.

It is worth noting that the patterns present a consistency for the Pahlavi and post-revolution eras, as poverty and drug abuse can be discussed, among the others, as two main factors involved in prostitution. According to the police census, Moeedfar (2018) and Madani Qahfarrokhi (2015), Madani Qahfarrokhi (2017), the average age of prostitution in Tehran has increased to about 30 in recent decades, 10 years more than the world average age of prostitution. Accordingly, Moeedfar (2018) conclude that women sell sex services because of poverty rather than any other reason. Generally, the shocking decrease in women’s training and skills, employment and the feminization of poverty has pushed women to prostitution (Papoli-Yazdi et al. 2018).

Conducting research about prostitution in Iran is still treated as taboo. Zand-e Moqadam could never manage to publish his monograph without censorship in Iran and finally published it in Stockholm. Shirdel’s documentary film is still unfinished; just as the photos of Golestan were eventually exhibited in London years after his death. Madani Qahfarrokhi spent years in jail and exile. His classic research on prostitution was not allowed to be displayed at the Tehran International Book Fair in 2019. Moeedfar was also fired from the university, as if censoring policies against prostitutes are now spreading to the researchers focusing on the topic. It would be fitting to finish our paper with the last words of Shirdel in his documentary, which metaphorically considers the amount of regret he (and literally us) has to see his work remain unfinished: *natamam* (unfinished).

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